



NEW JERSEY

DIVISION

OF THE RATEPAYER ADVOCATE

Consumer Advisory of Increased Natural Gas Prices



The Division of the Ratepayer Advocate is advising residential consumers that the worldwide increases in natural gas prices will soon have an impact on their monthly bills. Currently, natural gas prices are double the normal seasonal levels, which means higher heating bills for consumers this winter.

REASONS FOR NATURAL GAS PRICE INCREASES

Natural gas prices are higher because of limited production, high demand from other utilities and high demand from industry and consumers. Recent mild winters caused natural gas surpluses, which slowed new gas production. Natural gas producers have begun to drill for new supplies of gas, but they will not be available until next spring. The high demand for electricity during the summers of 1997 and 1998 caused utilities to look for other energy sources, such as natural gas, to generate peak power. The strong U.S. economy has increased demand for natural gas. With the increased factory production and booming construction that is part of a robust economy, gas usage has grown significantly.

WAYS TO KEEP GAS PRICES AT A MINIMUM

Energy Choice: Participation in the New Jersey Energy Choice programs may help consumers save money. These programs allow consumers to shop for the company that supplies natural gas to their homes based on a number of factors--including price. If there was ever a time to shop for a natural gas supplier, this is it. Although prices from an alternative supplier will be higher than previous years, consumers may still have the opportunity to beat the price offered by their local natural gas utility.

For more information call 1-877-NJ5-5678 or visit njenergychoice.com

Energy Saving Tips:

- Set your thermostat to the lowest comfortable setting--65 degrees to 68 degrees is comfortable for most people. Set the thermostat down to a lower setting at night and when you are not at home.
- Use a programmable thermostat to change settings automatically.
- During the day, keep shades open on the sunny side of the house. Close them at night.
- Wear warm clothing while indoors.
- Have a qualified professional or your utility check your gas heater to make sure it is operating efficiently and safely.
- Change/clean your filter monthly.
- Caulk and weatherstrip windows and doors. Also check the exterior of your home for places where caulking has deteriorated and recaulk any gaps.
- Insulate attics, crawl spaces, heating ducts, hot water pipes, and hot water heaters.

ENERGY ASSISTANCE FOR PEOPLE IN NEED

The Ratepayer Advocate is working to keep prices down and make sure there are programs to help people on limited incomes pay their bills because we know these natural gas rate increases will be a burden for many New Jersey residents.

LIHEAP: Qualified customers can apply for the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). This is a federally-funded program designed to help consumers in need of financial assistance pay for heating costs. In New Jersey it is operated jointly by the Department of Human Services and the Department of Community Affairs. Households receiving food stamps may receive automatic heating benefits through their County Welfare Agency. Eligibility for the program is based on total household income. Gross monthly income limits are set at 150% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.

For more information, call the LIHEAP hotline at 1-800-510-3102.

New Jersey SHARES: New Jersey Statewide Heating Assistance and Referral for Energy Services (SHARES) is a non-profit corporation organized to provide assistance to individuals and families living in New Jersey who are in need of temporary help in paying their energy bills. The New Jersey SHARES energy fund program will provide energy grants for New Jersey residential energy customers who do not receive monthly public assistance cash payments. These customers must also have demonstrated a good faith effort to pay their energy bills, but are currently experiencing a financial crisis and have exhausted all other available assistance.

For more information contact New Jersey SHARES at (609) 443-8118.

Energy customers throughout New Jersey can help those less fortunate by making a tax-deductible donation of any amount to New Jersey SHARES through a contribution form enclosed in their November or December energy bill. The donor's entire contribution plus a matching donation from their utility will go to help those in need.

Donations should be sent to:

New Jersey SHARES
299 Ward Street, Suite B
Hightstown, NJ 08520

LOCAL UTILITIES: We also encourage you to contact your local energy company to see if you can arrange extended payment plans, home inspection, or a weatherization kit. Contact information for your local utility company can be found on your monthly utility bill.



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